



Deer Branch supplement



Scent hunters

Tony Lowry, NGO Deer Branch committee member and chairman of UK Deer Track & Recovery uncovers some secrets of dogs for deer

I HAVE OWNED AND TRAINED MY CANINE stalking companions for many years and was very happy with the dog by my side. He or she did most of the things that we UK stalkers required, which was to find dead or (on the odd occasion) one that had simply disappeared into thick cover and could not be located. If the dog was by my side when stalking, it would always indicate deer long before I would see it.

So, why would I want anything else? Well, quite by chance I was invited to see what the Danes did with their dogs for deer. Sue, my long suffering partner, and I packed up some lunch and loaded up a very young chocolate lab and set off to somewhere just the other side of Oakhampton not knowing what to expect from our outing. There, along with half a dozen other keen stalking/dog people, we met the man and his dog that changed the way I now look at deer dogs.

That man was Kim Schou Jorgensen and his dog was Hemi, a black labrador. The demonstration he then gave was something I had never seen before in the gun-dog world. Hemi was moving along a trail which had been laid the night before only using red deer hooves (no blood). It was as if she was on rails and only tracking at walking pace with

her nose connected to the ground like a Hoover. The trail went out into a star which was like the spokes of a wheel that was some 30 metres wide. She didn't miss a single turn and came off where the trail went out for some 50 yards and then back along the same route and continued into a wood where the track ended with her prize waiting (one of the hooves that laid the track). She was totally focused on her job and so much so that Kim let Sue follow Hemi holding the tracking lead.

Since then, Kim and I have become friends with me travelling to his home in Denmark and him returning here to help with our training. Together we set up training days, and with his advice set up a small but dedicated team of dogs and handlers that hunters can call on in the event of losing a wounded deer. His advice has been invaluable.

Together with NGO member Richard Evans, I started UK Deer Track & Recovery, which provides a free service to stalkers and deer managers should they (on that rare occasion) wound or not be able to locate an animal. Our small team of handlers is slowly growing and one day we hope to be able to cover all of the UK. The selection process to become a member requires a few things: the handler needs to be an experienced

stalker and hold a Firearms Certificate and their dog has to pass a tracking test. Many members of our team are NGO keeper members or have come via the NGO's Dogs for Deer courses.

WHICH BREEDS MAKE THE BEST TRACKING DOG?

All dogs have a much better sense of smell than humans; to put it into perspective, a dog's nose has about 220 million scent receptors and humans have about five million. The part of the brain that controls smell is some 40 times bigger in dogs than humans. Most hunting breeds make excellent tracking dogs along with the more traditional scenting breeds such as teckels, dachshunds and all of the hound breeds. Like us, however, not all dogs are the same, and some are better at some things than others regardless of breed or training.

SCENT TRACK TRAINING AND HOW TO START

As with any gun-dog training, it starts when you get your puppy or young dog. When I say 'training' I mean more about the association with the work that lays ahead: it should be playful and fun at this stage. There are a few different ways and views on how to start the process of track training, but I have found the following

points very helpful to training my chosen dog breed.

Expose your puppy/young dog to as much deer work as you can. If you go stalking and manage to shoot a deer then take your puppy to the shot site and see if it can find your dead deer even if it's only a few feet away. If you don't do much stalking then ask a friend who does if you can bring your dog after he has shot a deer. All this will help condition your puppy/young dog for the work that lies ahead.

SCENT SQUARE TRAINING

Make square on your lawn of 1.5 square metre size, then drag a partly thawed lung or liver around the square. Throw a handful of dry dog food into the square and let your dog seek. The purpose of this is for your puppy to learn to associate the food with the scent.

LUNG, LIVER OR SKIN TRAIL

Make a trail in an area with which your dog is familiar. If the grass is long, trample it down and make a road of about 10-25m and maybe 50-75m for older dogs. Drag a piece of skin, lung or liver along the track you have made, then let your dog begin to seek and work the trail. Give lots of praise when your puppy is on the track. Should your dog lose interest or go off the trail because there's something more interesting or gets distracted, then simply pick it up or, for an older dog, put it directly back onto the trail. Do not say "No!" nor scold him in any other way. When your puppy/dog arrives at the end there must be a reward of food or piece of the liver and lots of praise. If your dog starts to run on the trail, then you must put him/her into a harness and long line. This problem is important to overcome as a dog that runs on the trail will do so for the rest of its life, and if it is too fast, there is higher chance of missing things on the track.

Finally, remember that as the handler, you must remain calm during your training.

As your dog gets older you can start to challenge it more by making the trails older, longer and more difficult. You can also start to use a little deer blood instead of the drags, and this is best done with a pair of scent shoes. Make your first scent shoe trail an easy one for your dog to solve, perhaps putting it alongside a hedge or fence line. If your dog is food-minded, then putting a few kibble nuts every couple of metres will keep

its nose to the ground. Only use a small amount of blood on any trail, as too much may confuse your dog. The mantra is: use enough but not too much and don't underestimate your dog's nose.

When you think your dog is ready you can start to use just the hooves in the shoes and no blood: that way your dog will be following the scent that is coming from the glands between the cloves of the hoof. Don't forget to use a marking system when laying your practice trails: using coloured paper, marking tape or coloured clothes pegs will enable you to see if your dog is on the track and help you read your dog better. Once your dog has mastered the no blood stage, it is ready to tackle work that comes your way.

Calmness, obedience and stability combined with your ability to read your dog are the most important things in the first part of your training. Don't

challenge your dog too quickly and be prepared to go back a stage if things start to go wrong.

Useful equipment you will need: marking tape or clothes pegs, scent shoes, blood dropper bottles or washing up bottle, harness or collar, 10m long line, deer blood and hooves. (Note: fallow, sika or red deer hooves and blood are better than roe to start your training.)

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR TRAINING

This article should provide you with a brief synopsis on how to start training with your dog, but information on courses and future dates are available on the NGO website.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON TRACKING AND TRAINING PLEASE VISIT UKDEERTRACKANDRECOVERY.CO.UK

